

John of God: An enigma for the medical sciences.

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Abstract. Some cures carried out by Medium João Teixeira de Faría (John of God) are presented. He claims to channel spiritual entities (Drs. Augusto de Almeida, Oswaldo Cruz, and José Valdivino) that have instantaneous access to the physical, emotional and spiritual history of each patient who is then treated by physical or “spiritual” surgeries, herbs, meditation, prayers and the ingestion of “energized” water. People operated on have no pain during the interventions and infections have not been observed. The mechanisms responsible for the healings are unknown.

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Palabras clave: João Teixeira de Faría, Juan de Dios, curación espiritual, médiums.

Resumen. Se presentan algunas curaciones realizadas por el Médium João Teixeira de Faría (Juan de Dios). Al parecer, el Médium João canaliza entidades espirituales (Drs. Augusto de Almeida, Oswaldo Cruz y José Valdivino) que tienen acceso instantáneo a la historia física, emocional y espiritual de cada paciente, que luego es tratado mediante cirugías “espirituales” o físicas, hierbas, meditación, oración e ingestión de agua “energizada”. Los enfermos operados no sintieron dolor durante las intervenciones y las heridas no se infectaron. Aún se desconocen los mecanismos responsables de las curaciones.

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INTRODUCTION

João Teixeira de Faria (John of God or Medium João) is a unique spiritual healer who carries out his mission in the village of Abadiania, located about 115 kilometers south of Brasilia, Brazil. The “Casa de Dom Inácio de Loyola”, where alleged spiritual healing entities exert their healing activities through Medium João, is situated in this town.

Several filmed documentaries and books have shown to millions of people, the testimonies of patients that have been treated and cured by this phenomenon which is Medium João (1-4). Thousands of people travel from different countries to visit this medium in search for help and healing of their diseases, many of which have not responded favorably to conventional medical treatments. Hundreds of doctors, scientists, physicians, politicians, academics, artists and filmmakers have been treated by the entities incorporated by Medium João.

In this article, some evidence and research findings on the patients treated by Medium João are presented.

SURGERIES

It is said that up to nine types of surgeries can be performed simultaneously by the Entities incorporated by Medium João (1). The physical surgeries consist in the introduction, in the nostrils of the patients, of a 16 cm long hemostat, whose tip is wrapped in a cotton swab moistened with “energized” water or the scraping of the cornea with a knife used for treatment, not only of ocular problems, since the eye is considered a representative of the entire body (1). People who received surgical treatments have reported no pain during surgery, no infections of wounds, and bleeding was minimal (2).

There have been several attempts to scientifically explain what happens when patients have undergone surgery. Alexander Moreira de Almeida, Tatiana de Almeida Moreira and Angela Maria Gollner requested the assistance of the Department of Pathology, University Hospital, Faculty of Medicine, Federal University of Luis de Fora, Minas Gerais, Brazil. None of the patients operated by the entities received chemical anesthesia and only some reported mild pain during the intervention. The instruments used were homemade and scalpel blades. These researchers reported that surgeries were genuine. Pathological studies revealed that tissues obtained were consistent with their origin and related to human tissues. They concluded that there is a need for further studies and investigations of the mechanism of anesthesia during surgery and of the absence of infections, in spite of the fact that Medium João does not use sterile surgical gloves or apparent aseptic measures (4). According to Schwartz and Simon (5), in the field of energy healing truth is stranger than fiction especially when it comes to spiritual healers as John of God.

Raven Wing (6) reported having witnessed several cases in which tonsillectomies were performed without chemical anesthesia. Medical doctors confirmed the removal of the infected tonsils. The incisions did not bleed because apparently the entities were able to divert the flow of blood in the operated area.

Savaris (2) interviewed 500 people who had visited the “Casa de Dom Inácio” between July 1993 and May 1994; 74.4% reported being helped and relieved of their ailments. Of these 500 people, 97.4% had faith in the healing powers of Medium João; 93.2% knew of other patients who had been cured by him; 89.5% witnessed surgeries performed without chemical anesthesia or antisepsis; 74% knew of patients cured,

without being subjected to visible surgeries and 93.8% stated that faith in the powers of João is important for healing, as well as the mystic atmosphere of the Casa, the prescribed herbs (energized *Passiflora*), holy water, prayers, the blessed soup served free to all attendees and the music that is played during the sessions.

TESTIMONIALS OF CURES IN "CASA DE DOM INÁCIO"

Of the thousands of testimonies, some that have been previously published by other authors (1, 3, 4, 6) are transcribed.

Ilsa Wilson comments (6):

"I came to the Casa in November 1998 with a diagnosis of cancer in both lungs and larynx that had not improved, despite undergoing chemotherapy and radiation therapy for a year. When I got to Abadiania I was sick, in pain, receiving morphine in the morning and afternoon. On the afternoon of November 12, 1998, the Entity Dr. Augusto de Almeida operated me. In November 1999, Dr. Augusto said that an X-ray would show that I was completely healed. I returned to Australia in August 2000 and practiced a chest radiograph. To date, September 21, 2000, I have not taken any medicine. The doctors could not believe what they saw: I was completely healed. Only a small scar remained on my left lung".

Observations of Pellegrino-Estrich (4):

"On September 12, 1996, I witnessed the removal of a 7x3 cm tumor on the right shoulder of a 28 years old man. The patient was Dr. Romeu Correia de Araujo Filho of Goiânia, Goiás. The operation was witnessed by Dr. Matos Divaldo Santana, specialist in gynecology and obstetrics, and three other doctors. The patient was asked to sit down on a bench, while the Entity practiced an incision about 6 cm long in the right deltoid. The tumor was removed almost totally. The cavity was washed with

'fluidized' water to sterilize the area. Two sutures closed the incision and the young doctor walked to the recovery room for post-operative rest. The whole process was observed by doctors and the crowd that was gathered in the Main Hall of the Casa".

Testimony of Bob Dingá (1):

"In 1986, I was diagnosed with a rare disease of the retina called serpiginous choroiditis. There were no drugs to cure and laser surgery was the only way to stop its progression. After five laser surgeries, conducted over 13 years, I was declared legally blind and I was recommended to learn Braille. In January 1999, I attended the Casa de Dom Inácio in Abadiania for one and a half day. I sat on the "current room" twice the first day, and I received a spiritual operation on the second morning. As I did not understand the severity of my surgery and did not feel anything strange, my translator and I began to walk around the town and spent many hours shopping crystals in Crystal City. I did exactly the opposite of what they had told me to do after surgery. At the end of the day, I was exhausted and began to notice that the Entity had made me a major operation, but it was too late. I had ignored the warnings and my vision began to worsen. Approximately three weeks after my return, João de Deus appeared to me in a dream. When I asked if I should go back to the Casa he said, 'Yes, twice'. In May 1999, I returned for three days and in August of the same year, for three weeks. After the May trip my vision returned to the level it was before I went in January. My vision improved dramatically after August 1999. In December, I visited the Casa for three weeks and had my most profound experiences and the improvement of my vision. I have a normal life again".

Testimony of Mauro Dos Santos Silva (3):

"Mauro was skin and bones when he first came to the House in March 1993. "I

was in the final stages of AIDS produced by a transfusion from a person infected with the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV). I waited for the Entity four hours in line. He prescribed herbs and said, 'I will heal you'. As soon as I came out of the Casa Main Hall, I returned to stand in line again and went for the second time that day to the Entity, who on this occasion said, 'Did not you hear what I assured you? I told you that I will heal you'. In September 2001 Mauro was interviewed by Bragdon (3). He confessed that he had been taking the herbs that were prescribed in the Casa and maintaining the recommended diet for eight years. He visited the Casa every 45 days to sit in the current room and bring other sick people. In the last seven years he had not suffered from any disease and there were no traces of HIV".

Testimony of Ignacio Zanelato (6):

"On May 14, 1990, Ignacio experienced a major detachment of the retina that was diagnosed by a medical doctor. Over a five-year period he had a number of operations for this condition, during which the doctors tried to save the retina but which instead resulted in the loss of his cornea. After a corneal implant, the problem was aggravated further when he suffered a major hemorrhage. The doctors became increasingly discouraged and finally told him there was nothing more that they could do for him".

Ignacio took a chance and went to the Casa, received an operation on a Thursday and left for home Friday. On Saturday, while he was still travelling homeward, his vision began to clear and he stated, "I began to see this marvelous world again. I thank God for this miracle that occurred four years ago".

Testimony of John Friesman (1):

"John suffered from a constant and violent headache. There was no improvement after visiting the doctor on numerous occa-

sions. With depression as a diagnosis and Prozac as the cure, John finally found a doctor who sent him to Auckland Hospital for an MRI".

I received the shock of my life in July 1998. The doctor who gave me the MRI asked me to wait in the corridor while he had a quick look at the scan. When he came to deliver the results, I noted he had become pallid. He explained that in his 17 years of working in medicine he had never seen a brain tumor as large as mine.

He immediately put me into surgery to relieve the pressure in my brain. During the surgery, he inserted a shunt valve into my stomach, with a tube that went from my belly to my brain and another valve in my skull: I felt fantastic after this, but the doctors warned me it was only the beginning. They needed to "de-bulk" the tumor because of its size. A second, more dangerous procedure was done two days later. This was a ten-and-a-half-hour operation, and they lost me twice, resuscitating me each time and then closing me up with only half the tumor removed because it was too dangerous to continue. The egg-sized tumor had also grown into my first vertebra so they removed a third of the vertebra trying to get any roots. They gave me massive doses of radiation after sewing me up plus large amounts of steroids.

I was in remission for one year. During that time, I went to Auckland Hospital every three months. I was very happy with myself, until on one such check the doctor just looked at the ground. He read gruesome statistics. "Fifty percent of the people with your type of tumor are dead within five years, but you do not have anywhere near that much time". He told me the tumor was growing rapidly. It had become inoperable and there was nothing the doctors could do for me.

I went to a phone and called my Dad. I said, "Dad, I am dying". My Dad is a Dutch-

man, a hard, stubborn man. He said, "Look, boy, do not give up. We will ring up every hospital in the world, if necessary, until we find someone who can help you". But they all have the same answer. There really was nothing they could do for me.

I had nowhere to turn. Then I received a phone call from an older man, Mr. Howard, from Great Barrier. He said that he had a dream the night before. "I was told I was to show you something". He showed me a video of John of God. I was determined to see this healer. There was only one phone number on the tape. It was of a young man who had crushed a vertebra in an accident and went to John of God for help. I called him. He told me he could only stand for about one hour when he first came to the Casa a few years before. He had been fully cured. He gave me the phone number of Bernadette Andrews, who takes people to John of God from New Zealand. She took me on her next trip.

There were 17 of us who went in front of the Entities that first day. I was in so much pain that I was walking on my tiptoes. I could not stop crying from the pain. John of God came out on the little stage in front of us. There were hundreds around us, but he seemed to look straight at me, walking toward me. I was elated. I thought I would be cured, but at the last second he veered to his right and went over to a Brazilian man. There was a woman holding an instrument tray. He took a scalpel and started scraping this man's eyeballs. I watched intently with every stroke. The man was in no pain; he never flinched. I do a lot of chainsaw work and know what sawdust in the eye can feel like. Yet, here was this man not even moving. I was upset that Medium João had not worked on me. But later on, the Entities scheduled me for surgery the following morning.

The next day I went into the surgery room and waited for John of God. When he

came in, he first said the Lord's Prayer. I had my eyes closed and my right hand on the back of my head. The non-physical surgery had begun. My neck and head seemed to become a bit softer under my hand, and I felt like butterflies were fluttering underneath my skin. It was amazing. Before I knew it, one of the aides said I could go home now because my operation was complete. I walked outside and suddenly realized I was walking on my feet with no pain. I was told to go back to my hotel and rest for 24 hours.

I was to go before the Entity again after seven days to have my review. I wrote a note thanking John of God and the Entities for a second chance at life. I was told to return when I felt ready. I gained strength and had no headaches or vomiting for a year. But then, in July 2000, I began to have headaches again. I returned to the Casa for a second surgery and was told afterward that I was fully cured.

I returned home and have been pain-free ever since. I had an MRI a few years ago to verify the healing. My physician, Dr. McDonald, was baffled by the results. The egg-shaped mass had been reduced to a small dormant nub at the base of my skull. The doctor decided I needed no other treatment".

HOW TO EXPLAIN THE PHENOMENON OF SPIRITUAL HEALINGS?

What survives death and transmigrates from one body to another?

According to quantum physicist Amit Goswami (7), the physical body dies with all his classic memories, but the monad (spirit) has no structure, it has nothing to die. The spirit, with its quantum memory, with its mental components, remains available as a conglomerate of mental and vital possibilities. Therefore, the spirit forms a continuum with the physical incarnations

that carries part of the individual identity, character, mental tendencies and feelings, mentally learned contexts, phobias, rejection of certain contexts; in short, patterns of good and bad habits that spiritual traditions call karma.

Ian Stevenson (8) devoted much of his scientific life to the study of children who recalled a previous life. These cases were initially described in countries and cultures with strong beliefs in reincarnation, and in the Buddhist and Hindu countries. In the Shiites of Lebanon and Turkey, as well as in tribes of West Africa, northwestern United States, and Europe several cases have been reported. Stevenson also investigated cases of children with severe birth defects that appeared to arise from previous lives.

Interesting evidences have been provided by the situations in which consciousness is not directly linked to the brain, such as in out of body experiences and near-death experiences (9).

It seems that consciousness can persist in the absence of brain function. If we accept the model that assumes that consciousness is the ground of being, the basis of all that exists, what survives is the spirit or quantum monad (7). This paradigm is a monism based on the primacy of cosmic consciousness (God, Tao, Brahma, Father Eloi or The Creator, in spiritual traditions) that is unique and transcendent but multiplies in many sentient beings like us.

When consciousness chooses, simply recognizes one possibility; there is no mediation of a third substance, and therefore, dualistic energy exchange does not occur (7, 10, 11). Consciousness can not collapse waves of possibilities of a spirit in the absence of a physical body, but if the disembodied spirit is related to a medium, the collapse of the wave function may occur (7). The spirit of the medium is temporarily replaced by the disembodied entity whose habits replace those of the medium.

Paranormal abilities of John of God

To understand the phenomenon João it is necessary to delve into the knowledge of Spiritism and its powerful influence on Brazilian culture. According to Spiritism, there is a single principle of consciousness (spirit) that survives the body and can interact with the visible world. For a good number of Brazilians, going to a Spiritist center is a way to get a second opinion on a disease (4). The Spiritist doctrine promulgates reincarnation and the possibility of communication with spirits through mediums (12-16) such as John of God, who takes the personality of the incorporated entity (14-16). This is also the case of JZ Knight that when she channels an entity called Ramtha her character transforms and adopts that of a dominant man (6).

Fraud?

Studies by Moura and Don (17) ruled out any possibility of fraud. Their research was conducted at widely scattered sites throughout Brazil. They observed several thousand patients being treated by 9 trance surgeons and videotaped several hundred of these cases. Topographic brain mapping revealed increased brain activity (36-44 Hz) when healer-mediums were engaged in trance behaviors. Their results suggest the presence of a hyper aroused brain state associated with the trance behaviors of the healers. They believe that such a state is required for this practice, but other factors may also be involved. In a small sample of patients monitored during possession trance surgical procedures revealed no high-frequency brain activity; instead, they found indications of cortical quieting, suggesting relaxation, despite the absence of anesthesia. Histological examination of a tumor excised from a patient revealed a human fibroadenoma. They concluded that these practices are usually benign and that

pain is often absent, despite the lack of sterile procedures and anesthesia.

Schwartz (18) conducted rigorous and carefully controlled experiments to study the accuracy and replication of communications of disembodied beings with five highly skilled mediums who received information from an unknown woman who had experienced the loss of six loved ones in the last ten years. The average accuracy was 83 % for information that mediums could gather from the woman studied. The average achieved by 68 control individuals (not mediums) was 36 %. These data suggest that highly skilled mediums are able to get some valid and replicable information from disembodied beings.

Telesomatic or distant healing

Since the Big Bang we are all intertwined, so in principle we can interact mentally with everything. But as entanglement grows proportionally to the number of interactions, it is more likely to perceive local information in time and space that the events that occurred millions of years or at a distance of millions of light years (19). The conscious mind of a person can produce repeatable and measurable effects on the body of another (12). These effects are known as telesomatics. One example of these effects is spiritual healing. The healer acts on the body of the patient through spiritual methods, sending healing energy or information (20). The healer and the patient may be in direct contact or separated by miles because the distance does not seem to affect the outcome. This type of telesomatic or distant healing is practiced by the entities incorporated by Medium João. The non-locality observed in distant healing is an example of quantum non-locality (7, 11, 12, 13).

As reported by Krippner and Achterberg (21), the research studies on mediums and healers have focused on the

outcomes of their ministrations rather than on their inner experiences during attempting healings, the latter being necessary to find the most promising explanation of their successes, when they occur. We also need to know if all the changes observed in the patients are clinically meaningful, the extent of the follow-up and the proportion of the treated patient sample that improved significantly. Well- designed clinical trials have not yet being performed exhaustively with John of God.

CONCLUSIONS

Multidisciplinary scientific research, free of dogmas and preconceived ideas, of mediums and spiritual healers, especially of Medium João, using the latest advances in medical technology, will lead to the understanding of the mechanisms responsible for the anesthesia, the minimal bleeding observed in patients undergoing surgery, the absence of infections in surgical wounds and the cases of cure of diseases unresponsive to conventional treatments. The results of these studies will very likely contribute to the potential increase of the therapeutic possibilities in contemporary medicine.

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